

Five Ways Social Justice Stands in Opposition to Authentic, Biblical Justice

by B. Nathaniel Sullivan

Justice means getting what you deserve without favor. “Social justice” means getting what you don’t deserve because you are favored.

—Michael Knowles,¹ narrating the Prager University video course² “Control the Words, Control the Culture”—

Key point: Social justice doesn’t resemble biblical justice at all. Actually, it is *injustice*, and believers must oppose it.

To access this and other Word Foundations articles on social justice, visit www.wordfoundations.com/socialjustice.

Social justice. We hear about it everywhere. The term seems so “user friendly.” It elicits positive emotions and vibes. Yet, as with so many other things, appearances can deceive. The fact that something glitters doesn’t necessarily mean³ it is gold. It might look good, but that doesn’t mean it’s of God (see Matt. 7:13-14). The way that looks right actually may lead to destruction (see Prov. 14:12; 16:25).

So it is with social justice.

What Is Social Justice?

In 2013, Dr. Calvin Beisner,⁴ of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation,⁵ wrote an excellent booklet in which he warned about the erroneous and perilous ideas promoted by the social justice movement (SJM). Titled *Social Justice: How Good Intentions Undermine Justice and Gospel*,⁶ the booklet begins with a vivid illustration from Dr. Beisner’s family life. Dr. Beisner uses it to explain what *social justice* means. We summarize the illustration like this.⁷

Calvin Beisner and his teenage son A. J. frequently play ping-pong. Typically the score is lopsided, with one player beating the other badly. Some observers may object. Isn’t the winner being heavy-handed and hardhearted, callous and lacking compassion? Shouldn’t Beisner and A. J. simply add up the total number of points, divide by two, and assign the same score to each player? After all, both are made in God’s image. Leveling out the score would only be “fair,” rectifying the disparity between players and compensating for the strengths and weakness of both. Pride and feelings of inferiority would be eliminated, gloating and discouragement overshadowed.

What does this illustrate on a societal level? It showcases a major goal of the SJM—redistribution of wealth.

The article on social justice⁸ at wikipedia.org affirms this to be the case: “**Social justice** is a concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society. This is measured by the explicit and tacit terms for the *distribution of wealth*, opportunities for personal activity, and social privileges” (emphasis added).

As the entry on social justice at conservapedia.com explains,⁹

Social Justice, also known as economic justice, is a term describing the redistribution of wealth supposedly for the common good of all. However, this comes at the expense of wage earners and liberty by demanding a society to conform. Those who work and have must give to those who don’t work and don’t have.

The article goes on:¹⁰ “This [the redistribution of wealth for the ‘common good’] is the fundamental basis of Marxism and championed by liberal progressives.” It’s absolutely essential to know about these connections, and we will mention this briefly a couple of times in our discussion. Primarily in this post, however, I want to contrast elements of social justice to elements of biblical justice, and thereby establish that the track down which the social justice movement is traveling is very different from the one the Bible recommends.

Hindering Debate

But wait! someone will object. *Who in his right mind can take issue with justice?* Good question! Actually, this question hits on a very important point. Advocates of social justice do not play fairly. Dr. Beisner observes,¹¹

By appropriating the title “social justice” for their vision, Progressives, who coined the term a century ago, begin with a marked advantage in the debate. Anyone who argues against them can be cast as defending *injustice*—and who wants to do that?

Critics of Progressive “social justice” have a double task. They must expose and explain the sad and unintended consequences of redistribution. They must also go to the heart of the issue: the meaning of justice itself and whether, in fact, justice requires the sort of equality Progressives claim it does.

Here’s another challenge critics of social justice face. Social justice rhetoric, and the ideas the rhetoric carries, have seeped into the church. Numerous advocates of social justice are church leaders. They use biblical language. Consider that the very words *just* and *justice* long have been used to describe the God of the Bible and to refer to a biblical ideal. Even so, the justice of “social justice” is not the justice Scripture commends.

What Is Biblical Justice?

According¹² to Dr. Beisner, Scripture upholds four basic elements as criteria for authentic justice. Dispensing true justice means

“[1] rendering impartially and [2] proportionally
[3] to everyone his due [4] in accord with the righteous
standard of God’s moral law.

**We uphold biblical justice when we
render “impartially and proportionally to
everyone his due in accord with the
righteous standard of God’s moral law.”
—Dr. E. Calvin Beisner—**

The first, third, and fourth elements in this definition likely do not need an explanation, but the second one may. An example of proportionality would be making a reward fit an individual’s positive contribution or crafting a punishment to fit his or her offense. For example, proportionality recognizes a difference between abuse of another’s *property* and abuse or violations against another *individual*. Further, it recognizes a difference between a death caused by accident and premeditated murder.

With all of this in mind, here¹³ are 25 relevant passages of Scripture cited by Dr. Beisner. Please take a few moments to read them, as they provide the foundation on which Dr. Beisner’s definition of biblical justice rests. (Also go to www.wordfoundations.com/biblicaljustice for a complete breakdown by categories.) Keep these passages and principles in mind as you continue to read.

Contrasting Social Justice to Biblical Justice

When we showcase social justice alongside the ideal of biblical justice, what do we observe?

First, social justice is coercive, while biblical justice affirms human sovereignty and freedom.

- Appealing to people’s sense of fairness, social justice rhetoric elevates emotions over facts. This sets the stage for strong appeals to the government to address perceived problems—but the so-called “problems” either are non-existent or have been misrepresented. In this mix, government intervention makes matters a great deal worse.
- Social justice advocates have “solutions” nonetheless. They believe the government should jump in and engineer a semblance of equity between groups that have been deemed to be far apart in the past—in terms of wealth and so-called “privilege.” To rectify the inequities of the past and even the present, the SJM calls on government

to tax those who have gained wealth “illegitimately” through “privilege” and to redistribute these resources to the otherwise disadvantaged. Advocates of social justice say this is compassion-ate, but government is incapable of emotions. Greedy politicians, however, often are guilty of promising government handouts in order to get votes. Mark it down! Redistribution of wealth in the name of “fairness” isn’t government’s God-ordained role.¹⁴ Moreover, efforts to redistribute wealth and power pave the way for the Marxist approach to which we’ve already alluded.

- With such a system, government becomes a major, or in some cases, a primary, source for meeting needs. It plays god, and in the eyes of many it becomes god. It is not the government’s job to meet people’s needs. The people themselves¹⁵ are to meet their own needs and the needs of those they love, with family members coming first (see 1 Tim. 5:8).
- Such a system rewards laziness among those who are a part of groups considered to be victims, and it penalizes hard work among those who are members of groups who’ve been “privileged.” This is contrary to biblical teaching. The Bible commends hard work and condemns laziness.¹⁶
- Such a system moves a country away from free-market capitalism¹⁷ (which has many components the Bible recognizes and affirms) and toward socialism (a failed economic¹⁸ and social¹⁹ system). The more the government takes of one’s hard-earned wages, the more one’s incentive to work is hindered and choked.
- The Bible commands²⁰ people to be generous and to meet the needs of those who are disadvantaged, but this generosity is to be exercised by individuals, or by groups voluntarily formed to address such needs. All such activity is to be voluntary, with gifts freely offered in response to the needs at hand and God’s commands and blessings.
- Some point to Luke’s description of the early church in Acts 2:44-45 and 4:34-35 and say the Bible endorses socialism. But the situation in the early church was light years away from socialism, since government was not involved in any way. Contributions were made freely²¹—not forced!

Second, because it views society in terms of groups that are assessed as either oppressors or victims, social justice ignores individual accountability. The wrongs committed by oppressive groups in the past, social justice advocates say, need to be righted by taking from the resources oppressors have amassed through their privileged status and redistributing them to members of victimized groups.

If an individual in a group deemed a victim is guilty of oppression, or if an individual in a group deemed oppressive is mistreated in some way, these “exceptions” are ignored because they simply don’t fit the narrative and won’t serve to advance the social justice agenda.

On March 8, 2019, Duke Kwon,²² lead pastor²³ of Grace Meridian Hill²⁴ in Washington, DC, tweeted,²⁵

When people hear “reparations” many retort

“forgiveness is better”

which is also what some say to victims of abuse

“no, forgive”

but forgiveness and justice are not at odds

what I release as a cross-bearer

what I’m owed as an image-bearer

alas, racial oppression is abuse

Taking to Facebook, Cody Libolt, a staunch advocate for biblical justice, posted²⁶ Rev. Kwon’s tweet on his own Facebook feed and wrote, “Collectivism is the premise that makes this possible.” Cody is right about this particular point. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th edition defines²⁷ *collectivism* as “The principles or system of ownership and control of the means of production and distribution by the people collectively, usually under the supervision of a government.”

The comments under Cody’s post are fascinating, but especially insightful is this from Jacob Brunton. Jacob, also a strong advocate of biblical justice, had replied²⁸ directly to Duke Kwon on Twitter; then he posted his tweet on Cody’s Facebook feed.²⁹

I’m all for reparations...from actual oppressors to their actual victims.

Can you point any of them out? If not, then it’s not “justice” you’re talking about, and you should take care to stop using that word. (Isaiah 5:20)

While I do not agree with Cody and Jacob on their approach to every issue, I believe we need more people who share their perspective on this particular matter.³⁰ Moreover, we need more folks who will point to individual accountability as the goal, just as Jacob did in this case. Individual accountability is the biblical ideal.

Third, social justice is racist. Eschewing racism actually means treating race as a non-issue. This attitude says, *The color of a person’s skin does not matter!* This means, in the words³¹ of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., judging people, “not...by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” Note that Dr. King did not ask that he or his children not be judged at all. Instead, he invited Americans to judge his children “by the content of their character.” Even more important than Dr. King’s words, of course, is the fact that the Bible condemns racism.³²

By contrast, the SJM overlooks character and sees only groups who either are victimized or oppressed. Most often, blacks and whites are pitted against each other because of supposed “white privilege” and a so-called cultural system that keeps blacks down.

Of course, without question, racism against blacks has existed in America’s past. And yes, it still exists today—but it’s *a lot harder* to find.³³ I’m sure you’ve noticed this, but apparently advocates of social justice—the social justice warriors (SJWs)—have not. How blind can people be?

Orlando Patterson³⁴ is a liberal black professor at Harvard University³⁵ who, in 1991,³⁶ wrote this³⁷ about racism in America:

America...is now the least racist white-majority society in the world; has a better record of legal protection of minorities than any other society, white or black; offers more opportunities to a greater number of black persons than any other society, including all those of Africa.

Fourth, social justice is divisive because it intentionally pits one group against another. It gives those who are members of the group deemed “victims” a feeling of superiority over members of groups that have been deemed “oppressors”—regardless of whether or not members of these “oppressive groups” are guilty of treating anyone unfairly. This is a breeding ground for temptations to covet (see Ex. 20:17) and to steal (see Ex. 20:15) through government redistribution of wealth.

Consider the life of the church and how poison the assertions of SJWs are to Christian unity.³⁸ Further, contrast the priorities of the SJM to the pleas³⁹ of the apostles to Christians to live lives unstained by worldly influences. The language of social justice is a language totally foreign to that of the New Testament.

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totally foreign to that of the New Testament.**

Some SJWs constantly berate white Christians for racist acts, including, broadly speaking, participating in the institution of slavery. Then they malign them again, saying they try to excuse themselves by saying they never owned slaves. Rather than encouraging believers to work diligently and give generously to those in need, as Paul did,⁴⁰ the narrative of the SJM instead shames white believers by saying the poor and underprivileged have a “right” to their resources as a matter of “justice.”

Again, how different this is from the culture of the early church, where believers met together joyfully to worship a risen Christ and to encourage brothers and sisters in the Lord to live out their faith in a world that desperately needed to hear about Him. Yes, there were tensions⁴¹ between Jews and Gentiles in the early church, and in at least one instance there was tension⁴² between believers who spoke Hebrew and those who spoke Greek. Yet, the whole

of the New Testament isn't about the church against itself, but about the church against the world.

Baptist pastor and Christian statesman Adrian Rogers once declared,⁴³ "It is better to be divided by truth than united in error." Yes, it is; but we must be aware that being united in error isn't the only destructive scenario. It's at least equally ominous to be *divided by error*! This is a situation the social justice movement fosters all too efficiently!

The remedy for this is clear. As believers, we must understand the truth and unite around it! We must be united in truth, letting our roots grow deeply in it (see Col. 2:6-8). Then we can effectively combat error wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head.

**A best-case scenario is for us as believers
to be united in truth. When we are, we can combat
error wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head.**

A great many errors can be found in the SJM. We must be wary, not only of the errors, but also of those spreading them. As Paul wrote in Romans 16:17, "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them."

Toward the end that the church might recognize and resist the false teachings being promoted by this movement and by SJWs in the church, a group of Christian filmmakers is producing an informative documentary titled *Enemies Within the Church*. Consider supporting this effort. You can find out more information at www.enemieswithinthechurch.com.

Fifth, the SJM recognizes rights as government-created and government-manipulated, not as God-given, fixed, and inherent. Our Founders, as imperfect as they were, got it right. Rights are "unalienable,"⁴⁴ bestowed by God on each individual by virtue of His having created every person in His own image (see Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6).⁴⁵ It actually was the Founders' work that began the process that eventually led to the elimination of slavery in the United States. Many do not realize just how revolutionary the Founding of the United States really was—particularly because of the principles⁴⁶ on which they established the nation.

Founding Father John Jay⁴⁷ (1745-1829) strongly opposed slavery. President George Washington appointed him the first Chief Justice⁴⁸ of the Supreme Court. He observed⁴⁹ that before the American Revolution and the establishment of a stable government for the independent states, very little had been done to pry the institution of slavery from American life.

America's founding ideals continually pushed the nation toward abolishing slavery, just as they continued to nudge it toward recognizing that all Americans, regardless of race, have the same inherent rights.⁵⁰

Sadly, however, our nation has departed from the truths that made us a free people and that have preserved our liberty through the years. Now, rather than recognizing rights as God-given, Americans look to government to create rights and manipulate them. We presented a thorough discussion of this in our last post.⁵¹ The social justice movement exacerbates this problem because it also looks to government⁵² to establish and maintain rights.

Be forewarned! In a culture like ours, with citizens having the expectations of government that they do, government *will become tyrannical and coercive unless and until it is checked*.

This brings us back to our first point about social justice. It is coercive. The connection we need to see here is that the social justice movement *enables* government to become and remain coercive as well. We've hinted at this throughout this post, and now we state it directly. This point also reminds us of the SJM's Marxist connections.

If government grants rights, government can take them away—and it will. In fact, it is doing so already.⁵³

A Final Point

Recall again what biblical justice⁵⁴ is. We uphold it when we render “impartially and proportionally to everyone his due in accord with the righteous standard of God’s moral law.” As we have surveyed five specific ways social justice contrasts to biblical justice, we have uncovered strong evidence that each of the following propositions is true.

- Social justice **isn't impartial**.
- It **doesn't advocate proportional, or appropriate, measures**. In fact, in some cases it seeks punishments for those who've done nothing wrong, and rewards for individuals who've either acted wrongly or failed to act rightly.
- Social justice does not seek to address individuals, but groups, so it **does not render justice to “everyone.”**
- It **pushes its own agenda rather than rendering to individuals what they rightly are due**.
- Further, it **ignores “the righteous standard of God’s moral law.”**

Social justice, therefore, is *injustice*, and it must be stopped.

We must oppose it by informing others and by rejecting the recommendations of the social justice movement.

Will you do your part?

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Notes:

¹<https://www.michaeljknowles.com/bio> — <https://bit.ly/2lKwqDx>

²<https://www.prageru.com/video/control-the-words-control-the-culture/> — <https://bit.ly/2GV2wEY>

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_that_glitters_is_not_gold — <https://bit.ly/2KVtMGS>

⁴<https://cornwallalliance.org/about/who-we-are/> — <https://bit.ly/2lP3IBC>

⁵www.cornwallalliance.org

⁶<https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF13E133.pdf> — <https://bit.ly/2nZrb3J>

⁷<http://www.wordfoundations.com/what-do-people-mean-when-they-talk-about-social-justice-2/> — <https://bit.ly/2lLY0QZ>

⁸https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_justice — <https://bit.ly/2exIMLY>

^{9,10}https://www.conservapedia.com/Social_Justice — <https://bit.ly/2nomtMs>

¹¹<https://downloads.frc.org/EF/EF13E133.pdf> (page 2) — <https://bit.ly/2nZrb3J> (page 2)

¹²<http://www.wordfoundations.com/what-is-the-biblical-concept-of-justice-2/> — <https://bit.ly/2nlpxtN>

¹³Exodus 23:3; Deuteronomy 1:17; 16:19; Psalm 82:2; Proverbs 18:5; 24:23; Romans 2:11; James 2:9; 3:17; 1 Peter 1:7; Leviticus 24:17-21; Exodus 21:35-36; 22:6; Deuteronomy 19:4-6; Proverbs 24:12; Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:4-6; 13:7; 1 Corinthians 3:8; Galatians 6:7-8; Colossians 3:25; 1 Peter 2:13-14; Exodus 20:1-17; Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:13-16 — <https://bit.ly/2nVljZa>

¹⁴<https://www.wordfoundations.com/governments-god-ordained-role/> — <https://bit.ly/2lL5t2z>

¹⁵<http://www.wordfoundations.com/who-meets-the-peoples-needs-3/> — <https://bit.ly/2njEknS>

¹⁶Genesis 2:15; Deuteronomy 8:18; Proverbs 6:6-11; 13:4; 20:4; 26:13; Ecclesiastes 10:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13; 1 Timothy 5:8 — <https://bit.ly/2nizmrF>

¹⁷<https://www.gotquestions.org/capitalism-Bible.html> — <https://bit.ly/2lO1VmL>

¹⁸<https://fee.org/articles/i-grew-up-in-a-communist-system-here-s-what-americans-don-t-understand-about-freedom/> — <https://bit.ly/2p41uwJ>

¹⁹<http://thefederalist.com/2016/03/15/socialisms-bloody-history-shows-millennials-should-think-twice-before-supporting-it> — <https://bit.ly/2nw2MCM>

²⁰<https://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-charity.html> — <https://bit.ly/2mFj7F1>

²¹<http://www.wordfoundations.com/does-the-bible-advocate-redistribution-of-wealth-2/> — <https://bit.ly/2mF8mCq>

For a thorough discussion of Acts 2:44-45 and 4:34-35 in the context of the early church and the political and cultural environments that surrounded it, visit <https://www.wordfoundations.com/the-bible-and-socialism/> — <https://bit.ly/2noNqjf>

^{22,23}<https://gracemeridianhill.org/about/leadership/> — <https://bit.ly/2mBC2Ao>

²⁴<https://gracemeridianhill.org/>

²⁵<https://twitter.com/dukekwndc/status/1104206559280807936> — <https://bit.ly/2o9pMrp>

²⁶<https://bit.ly/2nqIkTN>

²⁷<https://www.wordnik.com/words/collectivism>

²⁸<https://bit.ly/2oawyx6>

²⁹<https://bit.ly/2nqIkTN>

³⁰Cody Libolt and Jacob Brunton are co-founders of the website “For the New Christian Intellectual” (www.christianintellectual.com).

³¹<http://natmonitor.com/2019/01/15/the-color-of-your-skin-not-the-content-of-your-character/> — <https://bit.ly/2ocP73T>

³²<https://www.biblestudytools.com/topical-verses/bible-verses-about-racism-and-prejudice/> — <https://bit.ly/2nvflsm>

³³<https://www.prageru.com/video/is-america-racist/> — <https://bit.ly/2mE4LVm>

³⁴https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orlando_Patterson — <https://bit.ly/2ocT9t3>

³⁵<https://scholar.harvard.edu/patterson/home> — <https://bit.ly/2mFTcwL>

³⁶<https://www.nytimes.com/1991/10/20/opinion/op-ed-race-gender-and-liberal-fallacies.html> — <https://nyti.ms/2nxOBwG>

³⁷transcript of the Prager University video “Is America Racist?” hosted by Larry Elder — <https://bit.ly/2lVT9g9>

³⁸<https://www.openbible.info/topics/unity> — <https://bit.ly/2mHrNum>

³⁹Romans 12:1-21; Hebrews 10:19-25; 1 Peter 2:9-12; 1 John 2:15-28 — <https://bit.ly/2nxYevk>

⁴⁰2 Corinthians 9:6-15; Ephesians 4:28; Philippians 4:10-20; 1 Timothy 6:17-19 — <https://bit.ly/2mEjXBS>

⁴¹Galatians 2:11-13 — <https://bit.ly/2muo03P>

⁴²Acts 6:1-7 — <https://bit.ly/2ob5YDW>

⁴³<https://www.sermoncentral.com/sermon-illustrations/66083/listen-to-adrian-rogers-it-is-better-to-be-by-sermoncentral> — <https://bit.ly/2lV9UrE>

⁴⁴https://www.conservapedia.com/Unalienable_rights — <https://bit.ly/2ogsYl7>

⁴⁵Genesis 1:26-27; 9:6 — <https://bit.ly/2nyoGVX>

⁴⁶<https://www.wordfoundations.com/some-of-the-principles-upon-which-our-nation-was-built/> — <https://bit.ly/2mK7psB> and

<https://www.wordfoundations.com/principles-of-liberty-3/> (see Principle 4) — <https://bit.ly/2lYV4jX> (see Principle 4)

⁴⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Jay — <https://bit.ly/2E3yQoJ>

⁴⁸<https://www.wordfoundations.com/2016/07/27/the-importance-of-getting-history-right-part-2-2/> — <https://bit.ly/2m2OlWk>

⁴⁹<https://christiananswers.net/q-wall/wal-g003.html> — <https://bit.ly/2o8p3XI>

⁵⁰Civil rights leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., understood this. At the “March on Washington,” held on Wednesday, August 28, 1963, Dr. King declared,

In a sense we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. (See <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf> or <https://bit.ly/2fmjJXA>)

⁵¹<https://www.wordfoundations.com/2019/03/09/coercion/> — <https://bit.ly/2nw0hhU>

⁵²<https://sovereignnations.com/2019/01/30/russell-moore-says-rights-are-never-absolute/> — <https://bit.ly/2nBvl1k>

⁵³<http://www.wordfoundations.com/2016/06/18/misinformed-and-misled-how-a-distorted-perspective-of-rights-is-leading-america-into-tyranny-part-6/> — <https://bit.ly/2mHY3xB>

⁵⁴<http://www.wordfoundations.com/what-is-the-biblical-concept-of-justice-2/> — <https://bit.ly/2nipxtN>

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